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HOOSICK FALLS, NEW YORK DRINKING WATER AND GROUNDWATER CONTAMINATION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

General Information

Testing by the New York State Department of Health and the Village of Hoosick Falls, New York, has revealed that groundwater and drinking water in the Village of Hoosick Falls is contaminated with perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA). PFOA belongs to a group of chemicals used to make household and commercial products that resist heat and chemical reactions and repel oil, stains, grease and water. PFOA was widely found in non-stick pots and pans, carpets and fire-fighting foam.

PFOA does not break down easily and therefore is very persistent in the environment. Its toxicity and ability to build up in the food chain pose potential adverse effects to human health and the environment. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has been gathering information regarding the Hoosick Falls PFOA contamination in conjunction with the Village of Hoosick Falls, the New York State Department of Health and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

In 2009, the EPA established a provisional health advisory level of 400 parts per trillion (ppt) for short-term (**weeks to months**) exposure to PFOA. People should not drink water or use it for cooking if it contains more than 400 ppt of PFOA.

The EPA is developing long-term drinking water health advisories for PFOA based on the latest science. Once finalized, these health advisories will supersede the EPA's provisional health advisory issued in 2009. Short-term and long-term health advisories serve as guidance and are benchmarks for determining if concentrations of chemicals in tap water from public utilities are safe for public consumption.

What do we know about contamination of Hoosick Falls' drinking water?

Four out of five water samples collected from various locations within the public drinking water supply system in June 2015 had more than 600 ppt of PFOA. Additionally, groundwater sampling in 2015 at the Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics facility at 14 McCaffrey Street in Hoosick Falls found levels as high as 18,000 ppt. Some private wells in the area have also shown the presence of PFOA, though not at levels above 400 ppt as far as the EPA is aware.

How long have I or my family been exposed?

The EPA does not know how long and at what levels PFOA has been in the public drinking water supply. If you are concerned about past exposures, you should discuss this with your private physician.

Should I drink the water from the Hoosick Falls public water supply or use it for cooking?

No, not at this time. Until a treatment system is in place at the public water supply and confirmed to be consistently removing PFOA to acceptable levels, the public should not drink water from the Hoosick Falls public water supply or use it for cooking. Instead, the public should take advantage of bottled water available at the Tops Market in Hoosick Falls. Five gallons a day per household of free water is available to residents. EPA has recommended to the Village and Saint-Gobain that a larger volume of free water be made available to households where needed. For more details on this program, please see the Village's website: <http://www.villageofhoosickfalls.com/>.

How can I get my private well tested?

If you have a private well, the New York State Department of Health may test it. To request testing of your well,

- contact Albert DeMarco at 518-402-7860;
- send an email to bee@health.ny.gov; or,
- write to Albert DeMarco at New York State Department of Health, Bureau of Environmental Exposure Investigation Corning Tower, Room 1717, Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12237.

If you arrange for your own testing of your private well, please notify the EPA by contacting Larisa Romanowski at 518-407-0400 or romanowski.larisa@epa.gov.

Is it OK to shower or bathe with water from the Hoosick Falls public water supply?

There is a lack of studies evaluating the human health effects from inhalation and skin exposure to PFOA. Regarding inhalation, the EPA does not believe that routine showering or bathing would cause a significant exposure. A minimal amount of inhalable water droplets (aerosols) are formed during showering or bathing. PFOA also has a very low evaporation rate, which further minimizes inhalation exposure. Nonetheless, the use of bathroom ventilation systems and opening bathroom windows while showering or bathing can help remove the water vapor/aerosols that form during showering or bathing.

Similar to inhalation exposure, skin exposure from PFOA while showering or bathing is also not a significant exposure. Studies have shown very limited absorption of PFOA through the skin, and the movement of PFOA through the skin is extremely slow. However, as a precautionary measure and given the limited information on skin exposure, children or people with skin conditions (for example, rashes, cuts and abrasions) should avoid prolonged contact (such as long showers or long baths) with PFOA-contaminated water.

What about teeth brushing?

Consistent with the EPA's recommendation not to use tap water from the Hoosick Falls public water supply for drinking or cooking, the EPA recommends that bottled water be used for brushing teeth.

Can I use a humidifier?

As stated above, there is a lack of studies evaluating the human health effects from inhalation and skin exposure to PFOA. However, until a treatment system is in place at the public water supply and confirmed to be consistently removing PFOA to acceptable levels, the EPA recommends the use of bottled water for a humidifier. In addition, due to the potential PFOA residue that may be present in your home from previous humidifier use with water possibly contaminated with PFOA, the EPA recommends cleaning off high contact surfaces (table tops or other surfaces that people touch) where mist may have settled from the humidifier to remove any possible PFOA residue (wet wiping of hard surfaces using bottled water or appropriate commercial product and HEPA-filtration vacuuming of soft surfaces).

Can I do laundry with water from the Hoosick Falls public water supply?

Yes. While cleaning clothes and other items with water from the Hoosick Falls public water supply may result in some PFOA residue, it does not pose a significant exposure.

What about washing dishes?

PFOA is soluble in water, which means that it dissolves easily. The concentrations found in Hoosick Falls water are well below the level that would be expected to result in residual amounts of the chemical being left over on surfaces if items are dried with a clean cloth after washing or if dishes are washed and dried through the use of a dishwasher. Thoroughly dry hand-washed items (e.g. dishes, pots/pans, and cutlery, etc.).

Would an in-home carbon filtration system help filter the PFOA out of the water?

Granular activated carbon (GAC) filtration systems are effective at treating water for PFOA. The Minnesota Department of Health tested several “point-of-use” water treatment devices (filters attached to a tap) and found many to be effective (for a summary, visit <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/hazardous/topics/pfcs/wateranalysis.html>). If a treatment device is used, it is important to follow the manufacturer’s guidelines for maintenance and operation, especially replacing the filters according to the manufacturer’s recommendations. Moreover, testing of the treated water periodically would be necessary to ensure that the PFOA level remains below the EPA’s health-based level.

Is the soil safe?

There has been a limited amount of soil testing for PFOA in Hoosick Falls. Additional soil sampling may occur in the future. If PFOA is found in the soil, there are practical actions that would minimize exposure to PFOA. For example, where bare patches of soil are known to have PFOA contamination, grass, mulch, compost, etc. are effective ways to prevent direct contact with the soil. Additionally, don’t eat or smoke or engage in other hand-to-mouth activities while gardening.

Is it OK to eat vegetables from my garden?

A number of studies have evaluated the absorption into plants of the whole class of perfluorinated compounds (of which PFOA is one). Absorption into plants depends on the size of the particular perfluorinated compound and its chemistry. Smaller compounds have more uptake. PFOA is a relatively large compound and has lower uptake. Absorption also differs by the type of produce. Root vegetables that grow in the ground and leafy green vegetables (e.g. lettuce) generally have greater absorption of chemicals, including PFOA. Root and leafy vegetables also tend to adhere soil to the surface of the produce. Thoroughly washing root and leafy green vegetables with bottled water will further reduce the minimal exposure to PFOA from growing produce in soil contaminated with PFOA and/or watering produce gardens with PFOA contaminated water. One could also peel root vegetables prior to consumption.

Can PFOA coat the inside of my home's pipes?

Based on the high solubility of PFOA (ability of the chemical to dissolve) in water relative to the concentration found in Hoosick Falls drinking water, it would be unlikely for PFOA to coat the inside of pipes, but this possibility has not been well studied.

Can PFOA be removed from the public water supply?

Treatment technologies exist that can remove PFOA from public water supplies. One such technology is granular activated carbon (GAC) filtration. Another is called reverse osmosis. The Village of Hoosick Falls and Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics are negotiating an agreement under which Saint-Gobain would pay for the installation of GAC systems at the Village's water treatment plant. The systems need to be designed carefully to ensure that they will successfully treat the water to remove PFOA to acceptable levels. The New York State Department of Health will be working closely with the Village of Hoosick Falls as the treatment systems are designed with the goal of removing PFOA to the minimum reporting limit that can be reliably achieved by the analytical laboratory when using EPA Method 537. The EPA is providing technical assistance. Until the treatment systems are in place and confirmed to be consistently removing PFOA to acceptable levels, the public should not use the Hoosick Falls public water supply for drinking or cooking.

The EPA has also begun discussions regarding steps that need to be taken to:

- a. identify, control and clean up the source or sources of the PFOA contamination of the groundwater;
- b. determine the full extent of the PFOA contamination; and
- c. achieve a permanent cleanup remedy for the groundwater contamination.

How would these actions be paid for?

In this case, the EPA expects one or more private parties liable for the pollution to pay for addressing the problems.

How can I get more information?

The EPA has a web page with information about the Hoosick Falls drinking water contamination. The EPA will update this site as more information becomes available. Visit: <http://www.epa.gov/aboutepa/hoosick-falls-ny-water-contamination>.

In addition, The Village of Hoosick Falls has information on its website at: <http://www.villageofhoosickfalls.com>.

How do I contact the EPA?

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